

Manningham 1692

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THE
NATURE and EFFECTS
OF
Superstition.
IN A
SERMON

Preached before the Honourable
House of Commons,
ON

Saturday, the Fifth of November, 1692.

By *THOMAS MANNINGHAM*, D. D. and
Chaplain in Ordinary to Their Majesties.

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Printed by *Thomas Braddyll* and *Robert Everingham*,
and are to be Sold at the *Seven Stars* in *Ave-*
Mary-Lane, MDCXCII.

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Acts XVII. 22.

*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars-
Hill and said, ye Men of Athens, I
percieve that in all things ye are too
Superstitious.*

THIS is the beginning of that most
wise and excellent Speech, which St.
Paul made in the great Court of Athens,
where many of the Philosophers and Learned
Men of Greece where Assembled to gratifie
their Curiosity, and to hear what that New
Doctrine was, which he seemed so desirous of
Publishing amongst them. When St. Paul
talk'd so much of Jesus and the Resurrection, they

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took

took him to be a setter-forth of New Gods, and one who came to increase the Superstition of the Vulgar; for we cannot well conceive that all the Philosophers of that Age, especially the *Epicureans*, which was the most prevailing Sect at that Time, had any great Opinion of those Devotions and Ways of Worship, of which the Common People were so Zealous: However, they expected something that was new, something that might entertain their Inquisitive Minds, and give some Diversion to their Wit and Parts.

The Religion of the great Men of that Age was wholly turn'd into curious Disputes, into elegant Discourses, and a Gentile Way of proposing and answering some *specious Probabilities*, and of making their Conversations very easie as to matter of Opinions. They were sufficiently conscious that some of the Idolatries of the World were too *Gross* and *Absurd* to bear the Name of Religion, and too *Inhuman* to be practis'd by a civiliz'd People. Some Popular Worships they found it necessary to allow of, such as might give Amusement, and not prejudice the Commonwealth: They had subtle Distinctions and Evasions for themselves, and
so

so the Multitude would be but quiet and governable, and not disturb their soft Tranquillity; They were content that many fanciful Rites and Dotages should prevail, and be established by their Laws.

It is ealie to read this *Epicurean* Temper in the Behaviour of most of those *Roman* Magistrates, who were concerned in the Affairs of *Judea*; and their own Histories acquaint us that this was the Temper which then generally prevailed among their Great Men: Their main Business was Empire and Ease, they did not care to trouble themselves much about the Questions and Zeal of contending Parties, but suffered all Men to enjoy their particular Perswasions, so they raised no Tumults, and acted nothing contrary to the Interest of *Cæsar*. This was the Humour of the *Epicurean* Party, though others were of somewhat a warmer Temper.

Now *St. Paul*, who was not afraid of *Socrates* his Draught, spake such Truths before the Magistrates, and the most captious Sects, and in that City too, which was the Metropolis of all Idolatry, with that Freedom and Boldness as few of their wise Men, had they been able, would have ventured to have so publick-

ly own'd; who, though they were conscious of some Truth, yet for the most part detain'd it in Unrighteousness: But our Apostle, in an undaunted manner, declares unto them, the God of the *Jews*, the God, who made the World and All Things, the God, whom they themselves did ignorantly Worship; to whom they had erected an Altar, though they had appointed no Sacrifice.

There were some few of the more Thinking Men, both among the *Athenians* and the *Romans*, who had gone a great way in discovering and confuting the Follies and Barbarities of the more monstrous Sorts of Superstition; they could, in a great measure, pull down the old Buildings, but knew not how to erect a new one; they were vigorous Opposers of some very palpable Falshoods, but knew not where to find the Truth: Whereas *St. Paul* not only discovered the egregious Vanity of *Paganism*, but set before them the true and only Religion; the Worship of one God, v. 23. sincere Repentance, v. 30. stedfast Belief of a Day of Judgment, and an express and peculiar Faith in that Man whom God had ordain'd to Judge the whole World in Righteousness, of which he had given a full assurance and demonstration,
by

by raising him from the Dead, *verse 31.*

Now, if we thoroughly consider St. Paul's Arguments against the Superstitions of the *Athenians*, we shall find that they have a Foundation in *natural Religion*, but their main strength and last Evidence is built upon *Revelation*: For he reasons with them, That there is one God the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and all things therein; that nothing is more absurd than to make any material Representation of the Infinite Being: That Man is but an Off-spring of God, and if no Art can represent Man's Reason and Understanding by any Image in Gold, Silver or Stone, how much less can it figure out the Incomprehensible Godhead, of which Man's Soul is but an imperfect Image? That God is not to be worshipped with any Opinion of Indigency in him, as if he needed any thing, as they supposed their *Demons* did, who, as they fancied, were pleas'd, and, as it were, fed with the Steams of their Sacrifices; whereas he, who was Lord of Heaven and Earth, wanted nothing, and would be Worshipped for our Advantage, not his own: That he was the Creator of all Mankind, having made of one Blood all Nations of Men. That his Providence was over all, in Sustaining and Go-

verning

verning all Things : That though he had permitted the ignorant World to try their own ways, yet now he commanded all Men to Repent : And to confirm the general apprehension they had of a Day of Judgment, and to make it a certain Principle of all their Designs and Actions, he appeals to *Revelation* ; tells them of an Appointed Day, and of the very *Person* whom God had Ordain'd to Judge the World in Righteousness ; and lest they should think that he intended to remove one Superstition, only, to bring in another, he appeals to such a Testimony, to such a miraculous Confirmation, as God would never give to any thing but Truth, *viz.* to a Resurrection from the Dead : The Truth of which, if he himself had not been ready to have Seal'd with his own Blood, he would never have ventur'd to Preach *Jesus* and the *Resurrection* in the midst of *Athens*.

Now, having enlarged upon this Excellent and most weighty Speech, wherein *St. Paul*, with admirable Address, reprov'd the *Athenians* for their Superstition, and took an occasion to insinuate his own Doctrine with less Offence (for if they were so Hospitable to all Religions, why should they be backward in giving
Entertain-

Entertainment to his) and wherein he confutes the main Body of Heathenism by Natural Reason, of which they pretended to be the greatest Masters, and by the Authority of *Aratus*, an Astronemical Poet of high Repute amongst them; and lastly, wherein he not only confutes their Errors, but shews them the Truth; not by subtilty and human Methods, but by having recourse to the Revelation of God, and that testify'd, by the greatest of Miracles, the Resurrection of Christ from the Dead; having thus enlarg'd upon this Oration of St. Paul, which he made against the Superstition of the *Athenians*, in the midst of their great Court of Judicature, I shall endeavour these three Things in my following Discourse.

I. To lay down some Considerations that may lead us into a more distinct Knowledge of the Nature of Superstition.

II. To observe some of its more Barbarous Effects, such as the Occasion and the History of this Day shall suggest.

III. To propose some Directions to preserve us from this Horrible Sin, and the ill Consequences of it.

I To

I. To lay down some Considerations, &c.

Superstition in its ordinary use, is made a word of Ambiguity, and a common Term of Disdain, which is mutually cast upon all the Differences in Religion. The *Epicureans* counted it Superstition to acknowledge the Providence of God, and to pay him any Worship besides the bare Esteem of the Mind. The Heathen Writers, whenever they mention the *Jews* or the *Christians*, speak of them as a most wretchedly-deluded People, given over to an obstinate Superstition: But I think the Primitive Fathers have sufficiently manifested where Superstition was to be really charg'd, by exposing their Absurd, Cruel and Obscene Rites, and by Baffling all the Arguments which they brought to justify their Follies.

But still, there are vast Bodies of People in the World, who live under different Perswasions in Religion, as well as under different Governments; who are mightily satisfied in their own ways of Worship, and commiserate all who are not of their Opinion, as poor deluded Creatures blinded with Superstition. Nay, the Profession of Christianity it self, is so fill'd up with different Imaginations, Rites and Usages, that almost all distinct Communions
are

are Impeaching and Abhorring one another, upon the account of Superstition.

They who know the World, know that these are true Observations, and very deplorable : But sure there is some better Standard of Superstition than the opprobrious Language and Passions of Mankind, and that is the thing I am now to enquire after.

1. Therefore, 'tis well known, that *Plutarch* has written the most celebrated Treatise on this Subject, of any among the Ancient Hea-then ; for that Book of *Seneca* concerning Superstition, which *St. Austin* quotes, is not come down to our Hands. Now, though this Grave and Ingenious Author has deliver'd many excellent Things on that Head, and shew'd an extraordinary Zeal against those who painted the Divinity in a Horrid Shape, that they might Worship their own ill Nature ; yet when he defines Superstition by an *Astonishing* and *Dreadful Apprehension* of the Deity, he does not tell us the true Nature of it, but only points out one Cause, or one Occasion of it : For though Superstition may arise from Fear, yet it rises also from Ignorance, or a Stupidity of the Mind, from Love and Fondness, as well as from Fear, from almost any Passion of the Soul, and any Temper of the Body ; for

when the Natural Sence of a Deity, and of the Duty that Man owes him, comes to be vitiated with a mixture of Mens own Infirmities and Passions, those Infirmities and Passions stand ready to commence Superstition; there being nothing more requir'd, but an Opinion of their being *well-pleasing to God*, which is seldom wanting to Mens own Imaginations. Besides, to call a Dread of God by the Name of Superstition, is somewhat a dangerous Expression to Christian Ears, when we consider how the *Old Testament* does almost every where represent Religion by the Fear of God; and that the Prophets convers'd with him under great Tremblings and Terror. *Plutarch* was a *Platonist*, and the *Platonists* were a Sect of People who were generally of a soft and Amorous Nature, who plac'd their Happiness in the Speculation of Ideas; and who rarely consider'd God, as a Righteous Punisher of Sin, but chiefly as a most amiable Being for them to contemplate; they usually entertain'd very good Opinions of themselves, and of their own Perfections, and little thought of that Gulf which Sin had made between Man and the Divine Nature; and therefore they hardly allow'd such a just Severity to the Deity, as was requisite for the

wise

wise Government of the World, but made his Goodness to swallow up his Justice. Whereas God, who knows his own Nature best, has given us another Character of himself, *the Lord, Merciful and Gracious, and forgiving Iniquity; but will by no means clear the Guilty, visiting the Iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children*, Exod. 34. 6, 7. Superstition therefore, though variable in its Original and Effects, is always founded upon a false Apprehension of God, and consequently upon a false Apprehension of Religion, by which he is Serv'd and Worship'd: And as this false Apprehension of God and Religion arises from several Causes, and produces several Effects, so accordingly Superstition is varied; It consists both in Opinion and Practice; and though Practice be most Obvious and Remarkable, and that from which Opinion is usually gather'd; yet it may be defin'd, with a regard to both, *viz. That it is the Performing of a religious Service, with an Opinion of its being well-pleasing to God, though it be really unacceptable and unworthy to be offer'd to him.* So that our next Enquiry will be, to know what Religious Service is well-pleasing to God, and what is unacceptable to him.

I. Some have thought that the Manners and Customs of the Country, and the Pub-

lick Laws are the only Determination in this Matter : So *Seneca* is represented by *St. Austin*, for concluding that those Superstitions which he could not approve of to his own Mind, were yet to be observ'd, because the Laws commanded them : *Quæ omnia sapiens observabit, tanquam legibus jussa, non tanquam Diis grata, C. D. l. 6. c. 10.*

And not much unlike is, that which the Church of *Rome* Assigns, when she makes her Constitutions the only measure of what is, and what is not, Superstition.

But now this is a way of confounding all Truth, or of making it safe, as to Temporal Interest, for Men to practice the Superstitions of every Country, where they are publickly allowed ; but this gives the Mind no Light, nor enables it to make a Rational and Certain Distinction between Religion and Superstition.

2. An Appeal to the Principles of Natural Religion, and to the Dictates of sound Morality, did go a great way among some of the wiser Heathen towards the Determination of this Thing ; and therefore *St. Paul* insisted so much upon Natural Principles in his Speech to the *Athenians*, though he did not ultimately rest on those : Gross Idolatry could not stand before

fore the Light of Natural Reason, when it was well display'd ; but yet there were many lesser Extravagances from which the politer Hea-then could not free themselves by the strength of that Principle. Thus *Cicero*, who was a great Master of Morality, and deeply engag'd in all the Gallantry of Roman Vertue and Heroical Worth, made a shift, by the Sagacity of his Reason, and the Natural Probity of his Mind, to confute the more Abominable Opinions and Practices of the Superstitious in his Time ; whatsoever was Barbarous and Inhuman, whatsoever was Obscene and Filthy, and Egregiously absurd in the Gentile Worship, he perfectly detested, as directly contrary to the Benignity of God, to the Modesty of Human Nature, to the Universal Love of Mankind, and the Foundation of all Society : But when he had work'd his Reason to some height, and had proceeded so far as to give a good blow to all Paganism, by his Rational and Searching Discourses ; yet, at last, he found it necessary to retain some Sacrifices, and some Ceremonies in the Worship of the Gods ; for which he could give no other reason than the *Testimony* of the *Oracles*, and the *Tradition* of *Ancesters*. And this plainly shews, that there is no resting in this Argument, till we come to

Divine

Divine Revelation. We may, doubtless, go a great way towards the detecting of Superstition by the strength of that which Men call Natural Religion and Moral Principles, and the Eternal Reason of Things ; for whatsoever is apparently repugnant to the Notion of the Godhead, to the Perfection of our own Nature, and to the best Conceptions of our Minds, can never be the whole, or any part of the true Worship of God : But though this be freely granted, yet I suppose that Man would be hard put to it, that should undertake to prove that the Ceremonial Worship of the Ancient *Jews* was not Superstition, and be allow'd no Arguments to prove this by, but such as arise from the natural Notions of Things, and a suitableness to the Divine Nature : Had not God been pleased to In- stitute that Worship Himself, and to give Authority to it, by a multitude of undeniable Miracles, we should never have found any intrinsecal Goodness in it, by hearkning to our own Reason, or by contemplating the Divine Nature. So likewise, in respect to the two Sacraments of the Christian Religion, what Congruity can we discover between those material and sensible Ceremonies, and a pure and infinite Spirit ? 'Tis true, they are admirably suited to the Worship of a *God Incarnate*, but then that

that is matter of Revelation, and is the thing I contend for ; *viz.* That we can never boldly pronounce concerning what is true Religion, and what is Superstition, till we fix our selves upon *Divine Revelation* : For though, as I have observ'd, some of the wiser among the *Gentiles* were able, by Natural Reason, to discover some of the grosser Parts of Superstition, yet still they themselves were under the same Bondage, though in a less Degree ; as some Madmen, who are less Raving, will oftentimes speak with some Judgment and Compassion of the more Extravagant Madness of others, tho' all the while they too labour under the same Disease, but their Disease is not in so high a Ferment.

We must centre our selves therefore upon the Reveal'd Will of God in Matters of Religion, and not trust too much to our own Reasonings concerning the Divine Nature and Will, of which we should have known something, but very little, if God had not been pleased to discover himself to us in his holy Oracles : If Men shall go to make Religion, or any part of it out of their own Heads, they will certainly make a Superstition of it : There is not so much as a purely *Natural Religion* in the fall'n State of Mankind ; no Prayers or Praises,

or any of those we call Natural Duties, are acceptable to God without an Expiation, and an Intercessor; and these Things depending on the Will of God, can be no otherwise known, than as he has revealed them. Wherefore true Religion is keeping close to the Revelation of God in all the Essentials, and in all the substantial Acts of Worship, and Superstition is a departing from it in any of these. All the use we have of Reason in the Business of Religion, is to lead us to Divine Relation, and then to assist us in finding out the true Sence and Meaning of what is there deliver'd; and when this is done, we are wholly to resign our selves to the Will of God, and to believe and do as he has Commanded.

To effect this, Reason may proceed in this Method, and by these Fundamental Maxims.

That God may reveal his Will to Mankind in a Supernatural and Extraordinary Manner: That he can make use of sufficient means to confirm his Revelations to us, and to enable us to distinguish between a true Revelation and a pretended one: That whatever God Reveals is infallibly true: That if we will make a sincere Use of our Faculties we may so far understand the

true

true Sense of whatever God has reveal'd relating to his Worship, as to distinguish his Mind from false Interpretations, and to be secure, that we have right Objects for our Faith, and true Rules and Measures for our Obedience: But then farther, 'tis as Rational a Conclusion, as any of the foregoing, that God can reveal more than we can fully comprehend; or, that he can discover to us such sublime Truths, as we may have sufficient Reason to believe, tho' we have not Capacities fully to conceive; and it is here especially, that our Reason is to stoop, and to yield to Faith; for our Understandings are finite, and not a proper Measure of all Divine Truth; and what is more to be insisted on, they have contracted many *Weaknesses*, and much *Blindness* in *Spiritual* things; and upon these Accounts, it becomes us to be exceeding cautious, lest we should take our Passions and our Prejudices, for plain and evident Reason.

By these steps, together with the Universal Tradition of those Miracles and Matters of Fact, which are Recorded in the Scriptures, a Man may arrive to a *Rational Faith*; and then he may securely pronounce, that
there

there is but one *True Religion*, or acceptable Worship, which is the *Christian*; and that all the rest are Superstitious, whether *Jewish*, *Pagan*, or *Mahometan*; for the *Jewish Religion*, as 'tis now profess'd in opposition to Christ, and as 'tis stuff'd with modern Dotages, is a poor, wretched Superstition.

As to what concerns the charge of Superstition among Christians, it may now be dispatch'd in few words: For I do not see, that it can with any manner of Truth, be apply'd to any visible Public *Constitution*, but that of the Church of *Rome*; for I do not concern my self at present, with the multitude of unformed Sects. It cannot consist, either in the numberfulness or oddness of Ceremonies, when there is no Merit attributed to them, and they are not enjoin'd as Substantial Acts of Worship, or as parts of Holiness, in themselves well pleasing to God.

As to Superstition in Manners, or the bad use which some make of the Externals of Religion, that cannot be prevented by the most excellent Constitution of a Church, nor by the best Wisdom of a Nation; for when People are averse to real Goodness, they will try to go to Heaven by shifts, and place Perfection in Instrumental Piety; These are abuses

ses which cannot be wholly prevented by any Public Establishment; but People must be call'd off from such sort of Superstition, by frequent Admonitions, and by such Sermons and Discourses, as shall plainly shew, wherein real and substantial Holiness does consist. Whereas the Church of *Rome*, has Establish'd Superstition by a *Law*, and made it the most Celebrated part of their Worship and Devotion. A great part of their Religion is founded upon some particulars, which they conjecture, must needs be Transacted by Souls departed, and in the behalf of Souls, as they are in a State of *Separation*, concerning which Revelation has left us in the dark; wherefore, that must necessarily be a very great Superstition, which obliges People to receive such practices, as parts of Divine Worship, which have nothing to support them, but Man's Presumption. The Worshipping of Saints and Angels, is Superstition in the principal Sense of the Word, Δεισδαίμωνία, the Worship of Demons; notwithstanding all the fine colours, by which their witty Mentry to disguise this practice; 'tis hard to propose any two things in the world, that run in so exact a parallel, as the

Worship

Worship of *Demons* among the *Gentiles*, and the Worship of *Saints* among the *Papists*; a Parallel, not forc'd and sought for, nor mannag'd by *fansie*, but such as obtrudes it self upon the Observation, and offers it self to our first Reflections. Little did *St. Paul* think, when he made his admirable Speech against the Superstition of the *Athenians*, that he himself should one day be Worship'd as a sort of *Demon* in the Christian Church: But so it is, the Seducer has been too hard for those Christians, who would not stand to the plain Word of God, but would presume to make Additions to the main and principal part of all Revelation, the Doctrine of the Mediation of Christ: He has insinuated a most abominable Idolatry, which is the worst part of Superstition, under another dress; he has supply'd the *Papists*, with Angels and Saints, instead of Demons and Hero's, and has sent them *Jupiter* and *Mercury*, in the likeness of *Barnabas* and *Paul*.

Having laid down some Considerations, that may lead us into a more distinct Knowledge of the Nature of Superstition; I proceed in the

Second place, to observe some of its more barbarous

barbarous Effects, such as the present Occasion, and the History of this Day shall suggest.

Had we only the *Follies* and *Impieties* of Superstition to complain of, it were a Grievance worthy the Care and Wisdom of a Christian Nation to provide against; but when we consider, that nothing animates People more to *Sedition*, and to an abhorrence of all good Government, than Superstition; that it is the most fruitful parent of ignorant and bitter Zeal; that the most cruel Conspiracies, and most mischievous Designs are generally suggested by Superstitious Councils, and most commonly attempted by Men of Enthusiastick Tempers, embolden'd by false Opinions in Religion; when we consider these things, and what a peculiar Malignity there is in all Superstition against the Civil Peace of Kingdoms, and the safety of Publick States; there seems to lye a new *Obligation* on the *Magistracy* to hinder the increase of that Distemper in Religion, which is so apt to turn into the worst *Plague* of Government, a *Rebellion* upon pretence of *Conscience*. Tacitus^{Hist. l. 1. s. 3.} observes of the *Egyptians* of his time, that they would hardly obey any *Magistrates*, or hearken

hearken to any Laws, upon the account of their numerous Superstitions. And the History of our own Times may satisfy any reasonable Person, that when ever People of such Perswasions and Tempers shall be suffer'd to come to a Head, there will soon be an end of all just Authority : For what legal Restraint can be laid upon those, who presume themselves actuated in all things by a Divine Impulse, and that all the Murders they commit, are but so many Acceptable Sacrifices to God? and who will be sure to throw off their Civil Subjection, as soon as ever it shall come into their Fancies, that God will help them against their Magistrates?

The Conspiracy of this day is Evidence enough, what Cruel and Barbarous Designs Superstition is always big with, tho', God be thank'd, it has not always strength to bring forth : Nothing, it seems, could content those Superstitious Zealots, but the choicest Sacrifice, made up of the noblest Blood, and the Flower of Humane Nature gather'd into one body : And that there might be nothing to oppose their hellish Design, they were resolv'd not to give the blow, till all the Authority, Wisdom, and Courage of the Nation were

were met in one August Assembly; but Providence, which presides over Kingdoms, is especially watchful over Parliaments, by which Kingdoms are best secur'd; and still continues a Succession of Them to withstand all Popish Counsels and Attempts, and to praise the Lord for that great Deliverance.

But seeing many are not apt to be so very sensibly affected with those Deliverances, which were conferr'd on the Generations before them; behold! this Day has been since enlarged with *new Mercies*, and therefore requires a double Gratitude from us. When the Men of the same Superstition had brought another horrible Design almost to effect, of undermining the Government, and of blowing up the Laws and Constitutions of this Kingdom and Church; even that was as miraculously prevented by a Divine and seasonable Interposál; and it must needs raise our Wonder and Joy, when we consider, who that Deliverer was, that Providence sent us: A Royal Prince out of that very Line, which was on this Day devoted to an utter Extinction: A Prince born so near this almost fatal Day, his Birth having an immediate priority to this Anniversary, that Heaven

ven thereby seems to assure us, that He has an Ascendant over all the Malignant Influences of Popish Sorcery; and that their Divinations shall never prevail against him; and that by his very Nativity, he is pointed out to be the Guardian of the Protestant Cause: And what is another remarkable Circumstance in our Deliverer, he is a Prince descended from that Noble Ancestor of his, who withstood the Tyranny and growing Monarchy of *Spain*, when she thought to have grasp'd all the Liberties of *Europe*; and having drank deep of the Cup of Fornications, had given her Power and her Strength unto the Beast.

These are Considerations, that would tempt any Rational Man, tho' of no Prophe-tical Genius, to conclude, that doubtless, some greater Revolution than what we have yet experimented, is moving on; unless our Ingratitude stop it.

Besides, the Mercies that we have every Year Commemorated since that happy Revolution; we are still to bless God, that we have our Establish'd Religion, and may serve him without a Slavish and Superstitious Fear. That our King is still Vigorous and

Active

Active, to watch and to withstand, a very Subtil, Powerful, and Implacable Enemy. Little do People think, what an instance it is of God's especial Goodness towards us, that we are not given over as a Prey unto his Teeth, that He can only Attempt and Threaten, and that His terrible fierceness is still bound up and restrain'd, tho' not confounded; That we have struck a hook into the Jaw of that Leviathan, by our late Victory at Sea, and hope, in a short time, to take an effectual care, that that *Leviathan* shall no longer take his Pastime in the deep. And tho' it be an *Amphibious* Creature that we have to deal with, whose greatest Strength lyes on the Land; yet by a prodigious Gallantry, of some of the Bravest Men that ever gave their Lives for their Country; He has been lately taught, that it would not be so hard for us to Conquer, if he had but Courage to give us one fair Battel.

'Tis not the Method of Divine Providence, to do all for us at once, but to try our Gratitude, by several instances of his goodness gradually dispens'd, and to mingle some Hardships with the Deliverances he sends us; to see whether we will repent and amend, and whether we are worthy of the continuance of his Favour.

If he finds by the daily increase of Wickedness amongst us, that he shall not be Glorify'd by our Prosperity, he will change his Method of dealing with us, and be Glorify'd in our Oppression. If we grow so nice, as to murmur at his proceedings, because they do not exactly answer to all our Desires; if we prove so unreasonable, as to think we are undone, because our Safety puts us to some Expences; and if our Condition appear miserable, because our Blessings are somewhat chargeable to us; then have we Reason to fear, lest our Repining should provoke God to make us Drink deeper of the Cup of Afflictions, before he gives us a farther Delivery.

The Ministers of the Gospel have been often put to make Apologies for the darker Providences of God; but the untoward Temper of this Age puts us upon making Apologies for his very Mercies too: Men have been so much us'd to Infidelity, that they will not believe their own Temporal Happiness, if they can find the least thing to object against it.

We all understand what Discontents there are in this Kingdom; (and can any of you remember, when this Nation was without its

Com-

Complaints ?) we know what ill Representations some are ready to make of every Management, and of every Event ; we grant there are many difficulties under which we lye at present, and that the carrying on of so Necessary and so Diffusive a War, must needs be our burthen, as well as our Security ; but none of these things must put a damp upon our Spirits, lessen our Gratitude to God, or check our forwardness in contributing largely towards the Maintaining of that Cause, in which the whole Protestant Interest is bottom'd ; and in which his Majesty has been so Nobly seconded, by the concurrent Assistance, of a Wise, a Sensible, and a Generous Parliament.

III. I come in the last place, to lay down some Directions, to preserve us from the Horrible Sin of Superstition, which is one great occasion of all the Troubles of this Kingdom.

And here I beg leave, to recommend Three Things more especially.

1. The first is, a thorough insight into the Law of Nature, and the obligation of Moral Actions ; an excellent piece of Wisdom, and brought to great Perfection in some late

Writings: The study of this, will render Mens Judgments sound and masculine, make them less lyable to Superstitious Fancies, and consequently less subject to Atheistical Conceits, which many run into, by an Injudicious and too hasty abhorrence of the other. Make but a sober Enquiry into the True Nature of Humane Actions, and that will quickly Teach you, to distinguish between Moral Duties, and Ritual Performances, and Barbarous Impieties, acted under the pretence of Religion; and to prefer Obedience, Righteousness, Temperance, and Mercy, before the Sacrifice of Fools and Madmen; it will bring you to acknowledge, that your best Actions fall below your Rule, and then the Defects of Morality, will directly lead you to seek after an Expiation for those Defects, and that Expiation is Christ our Saviour.

2. Do but take a serious view of the horrible Superstitions of the Ancient and Modern Heathen, and you will quickly abhor all approaches towards such Degeneracies from common Reason, and from the first Notions of Religion; and not indure that Christianity should have any of those sordid mixtures brought into it; which in time would make
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that Heavenly Institution an Instrument of the vilest practices in the World: For when once the Superstitious get a Head, there will be no stopping of them; they will rage in all manner of bloody and barbarous Effects; in the destruction of Cities, Families, Provinces, as very acceptable parts of Devotion; they will proceed, for all that I know, from Plots and Massacres, to worship God directly by Humane Sacrifices; from the attempting to blow up Parliaments, to the offering up their own Sons and Daughters unto Devils.

3. Do but peruse the History of the Church in its first and purest Ages, and you will wonder how that Grave Matron, the Christian Religion, came to put on such a meretricious Paint, as it appears with in the Church of *Rome*; how old plainness and Sincerity came to be so supplanted by Artifice and Fraud; how Goodness, Candor, Peaceableness, and lawful Subjection came to be run down by Fury and Rebellion, and horrid Conspiracies undertaken with Ceremonies of Religion; and how the most Solemn Worship of one God, thro' one Mediator, came to be turn'd almost into the Worship of one Pope, and all such Saints as he shall please to Canonize;

Canonize; either for their Holiness, or for their Villany.

2. For a general Direction to all Christians, who would not be ensnar'd by Superstition; I intreat them to stand to the Holy Scriptures, and to well season their Minds with a due sense of the Christian Religion from those Pure and Spiritual Discourses which our Saviour himself has left us: To consider, what are the especial Duties to which he has annexed his Blessings, and what is the Hypocrisie and Formal Worship he has most zealously oppos'd. 'Tis conversing much with the Holy Scriptures, that alone is able to make a Man Devout and Discreet at the same time; there is no such security against all Superstition, as a constant recourse to the Word of God, that Crystal Fountain of all Truth, Holiness, Wisdom, and Love; and when these Graces are well infus'd into our Hearts, nothing but what is solid in Religion will be able to make any strong Impression on our Souls.

To conclude, That which I am willing to leave very affecting and warm upon your Minds, is this, That I fear our little Differences in Politicks, have very much abated of that
just

just abhorrence which is due to the Abominable Superstitions of the Church of *Rome*; and so the last Error may be worse than the first: But whatever miscarriages we mutually impute to each other, let us all assure ourselves, that *Popery* is still the same Corruption of Christianity as before, and that there is no Alteration in the Opinions and Designs of that Church, whatever there may be in the Piety and Constancy of those who seem to slacken very much in their Opposition against it. Let us endeavour to behave our selves with that Moderation, that all Parties may come into the true Interest of the Nation, which is the preservation of the Protestant Religion; that all our Hearts may be united into the same general Policy and Wisdom; that our Divisions may be no longer a Reproach to our selves, and a Triumph to our Enemies: And, in a word, that Luxurious *Fasts*, Murmuring *Thanksgivings*, and false Professions of *Allegiance* may not be the ruin of this Church and Kingdom! If neither Judgments nor Mercies will do us any good; if we are of too perverse a Temper, either to be Humbled or Oblig'd, then our greatest Calamity is not remov'd, but only deferr'd;
but

but if we have Hearts truly thankful for former Deliverances, and have the Grace and Skill to manage a present Blessing, when 'tis put into our Hands, we may still be a Prosperous and a Great People, and such as the Lord shall delight to visit with Mercies, Deliverances, and a mighty Salvation: *Which God of his Infinite Mercy grant us, thro' Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord.*

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be all Honour, Glory, Power, Praise and Thanksgiving, now and for ever more. Amen.

F I N I S.